

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 3 Home Book Delivery for Elementary Students

SPONSOR(S): Trabulsy

TIED BILLS: None **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** None

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
1) Early Learning & Elementary Education Subcommittee		Wolff	Brink
2) PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee			
3) Education & Employment Committee			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Research shows that providing books to students both empowers parents to engage with their child's reading activities and improves students' reading skills. The bill creates the New Worlds Reading Initiative, Florida's first statewide book distribution program, to provide at-home literacy supports for elementary school students reading below grade level. Under the initiative, a hardcopy book is delivered on a monthly basis to eligible students enrolled in a participating school district. Their parents are provided with resources to help improve the student's reading skills and instill a love of reading.

Implementation of the initiative is split between a state administrator—either the Department of Education or a contracted, third-party entity—and school districts partnering with one or more nonprofit organizations. The statewide administrator must create an application process for school districts seeking to participate, curate the books to be distributed, and coordinate book delivery. The statewide administrator must also develop a suite of electronic tools parents may use to help their children improve their reading skills.

Participating school districts and nonprofit, community organization partners are responsible for identifying eligible students and marketing and fundraising for the initiative, respectively. Eligible students include those having a substantial reading deficiency or reading below grade level based on statewide, standardized assessments. Students remain in the initiative until they are promoted to sixth grade or their parent opts out.

The bill requires that eligible students at a charter school that is located in a participating school district be allowed to enroll in the initiative. A charter school located in a nonparticipating school district may independently submit an application to the administrator, so long as it meets the same requirements as school districts.

The bill requires that books be delivered at no cost to families. Funding for the purchase and delivery of books must be shared equally by the statewide administrator and each participating school district on a pro rata basis based on total enrollment in the initiative.

Because the amount of funds necessary for the administrator to subsidize 50 percent of the costs to deliver books is dependent on locally raised funds and student enrollment in the initiative, the fiscal impact of the bill is indeterminate.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2021.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Present Situation

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) demonstrates that Florida 4th grade students' reading skills increased annually, and have been higher than the national average, since 2003. However, after a 12-year period of steady improvement, 6 years ago, Florida's literacy rates for elementary school children stagnated. Since then, 4th grade NAEP reading scores have regressed to where they were from 2007 to 2009.¹

Results from the 2018-2019 Florida statewide, standardized English Language Arts (ELA) assessments, the most recent academic year in which the assessments were administered, shows that 43 percent of third grade students are reading below grade level.² The statewide, standardized grade 3 ELA assessment is a critical indicator of academic performance, as 88% of children who did not graduate from high school struggled with reading in 3rd grade.³

Moreover, results from the Fall 2019 Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener indicate that nearly half of Florida's kindergarten-age students are not "ready" for kindergarten based on their literacy skills.⁴

Identification and Intervention

Florida law requires each school district to produce a K-12 Comprehensive Evidence-Based Reading Plan and include the criteria it uses to determine whether a student has a substantial reading deficiency.⁵ Students in kindergarten through 3rd grade who exhibit a substantial reading deficiency, based on locally collected data, statewide assessments, or through teacher observations, must be given intensive reading instruction immediately following the identification of the deficiency.⁶ Students who do not achieve a Level 3 or above on the statewide, standardized ELA assessment must be evaluated to determine the nature of the student's difficulty, the areas of academic need, and strategies for providing academic supports to improve the student's performance.⁷ District school boards are required to prioritize remedial and supplemental instruction resources first to students in kindergarten through 3rd grade who have a substantial reading deficiency and then to students who fail to meet performance levels required for promotion under the district's student progression plan.⁸

School districts have a variety of intervention and progress monitoring options available to help students improve their academic performance. The law requires districts to develop and implement a multi-tiered system of supports, which utilizes a problem-solving process to identify and support student needs based upon available data, including attendance, behavior and discipline, statewide assessment,

¹ Kymyona Burk, Ed.D, Foundation for Excellence in Education, *How the Science of Reading is Transforming Education and Opportunities for All Students*, presentation before the Early Learning & Elementary Education Subcommittee, (Jan. 14, 2021).

² Florida Department of Education, 2018-2019 ELA Assessment Results, on file with the Committee.

³ Donald J. Hernandez, *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, <https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-DoubleJeopardy-2012-Full.pdf#page=3> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

⁴ Florida Department of Education, Fall 2018 Compared to Fall 2019 Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS) District Results, FLKRS Statewide Results, <http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/flkrs/flkrs-sw-results.stml> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

⁵ Rule 6A-6.053(9)(c)3., F.A.C. The State Board of Education amended the rule on January 13, 2021. The new rule specifies criteria for the determination that a student has a substantial deficiency in reading, including, scoring the lowest level or benchmark on any assessment approved by the district, scoring the lowest achievement level during a progress monitoring assessment approved by the district, or the student demonstrates minimum skill levels in one or more areas of phonological awareness; phonics; vocabulary, including oral language skills; reading fluency; and reading comprehension.

⁶ Section 1008.25(5)(a), F.S. Students in kindergarten through grade 2 do not participate in statewide, standardized assessments.

⁷ Section 1008.25(4)(a), F.S.

⁸ Section 1008.25(3), F.S.

and progress monitoring data.⁹ Retention is mandatory for 3rd grade students who score at Level 1 on the statewide, standardized ELA assessment.¹⁰ Any student retained in 3rd grade because of his or her statewide, standardized ELA assessment score must receive intensive interventions and be taught by a “highly-effective” teacher with a reading endorsement or certification.¹¹ This intervention process must include parent involvement, student observation, review of data, vision and hearing screening to rule out sensory deficits, and evidence-based interventions implemented in the general education environment.¹²

Parental Engagement in Children’s Reading

A literacy-rich home environment is an important component in improving a child’s literacy skills,¹³ because it offers access to literacy materials, such as books in the home and trips to the library, as well as regular opportunities to engage with adults in literacy activities, including shared book reading and teaching letters and sounds.¹⁴ These activities are especially effective when based in the “Science of Reading,” an established method of improving children’s literacy skills through the systematic introduction of phonics (the connection of sounds with letters) and knowledge that aids in the development of literacy skills.¹⁵ Parental engagement in these literacy activities at home plays a vital role in a child’s learning and development of literacy skills.

When a student is identified with a substantial reading deficiency, Florida law requires the student’s school to notify his or her parent.¹⁶ The school must provide an explanation of the child’s particular difficulty in reading as well as descriptions of the services available and proposed interventions designed to address the child’s reading deficiency.¹⁷ These parents are also provided with a “read at home plan,” which outlines strategies that parents can use to help their children improve in reading.¹⁸ In addition, parents must receive their child’s performance results on the statewide, standardized ELA assessment in an easy to understand format within 1 week of the school district receiving results from the department.¹⁹ Among other requirements, the results report must outline specific actions and available resources for parents to assist their child based on identified strengths and weaknesses.²⁰

Book Distribution Programs

Book distribution programs seek to enhance home literacy environments by supplying free books to families to encourage early reading.²¹ Book distribution programs are particularly effective when they provide parents with supports such as demonstrating book-reading, information sessions about literacy, and facilitating multiple personal contacts with families.²² As research has shown book distribution programs to be effective and relatively low cost,²³ states, like Tennessee and Connecticut, have

⁹ See Rules 6A-6.0331(1) and 6A-1.099811(2)(r), F.A.C.

¹⁰ Section 1008.25(5)(b), F.S. A student may be promoted if he or she meets a “good cause” exception as provided in s. 1008.25(6)(b), F.S.

¹¹ See ss. 1008.25(5)(b) and (7) and 1012.34(2)(e), F.S.

¹² Rule 6A-6.0331(1), F.A.C.

¹³ Eileen T. Rodriguez & Catherine S. Tamis-LeMonda, *Trajectories of the Home Learning Environment Across the First 5 Years: Associations with Children’s Vocabulary and Literacy Prekindergarten*, 82 CHILD DEVELOPMENT 1058, 1059 (2011).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ The “Science of Reading” is an interdisciplinary body of research, incorporating developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience, focusing on reading as a complex human behavior. This research-based method informs effective instruction of children learning to read. Mark Seidenberg, *Connecting the Science of Reading and Educational Practices*, <https://seidenbergreading.net/science-of-reading/> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

¹⁶ Section 1008.25(5)(c), F.S.

¹⁷ Section 1008.25(5)(c)1-3., F.S.

¹⁸ Section 1008.25(5)(c)5., F.S.

¹⁹ Section 1008.22(7)(h), F.S.

²⁰ Section 1008.22(7)(h)2-3., F.S.

²¹ Merel de Bondt et al., *Do Book Giveaway Programs Promote Home Literacy Environment and Children’s Literacy-Related Behavior and Skills?*, 90 Review of Education Research 349, 349 (2020). [hereinafter *Book Giveaway Programs*]

²² *Id.* at 366.

²³ *Id.* at 350.

implemented book distribution programs to students.²⁴ Tennessee’s program, K-3 School Year Book Delivery Program, partners with a book publisher to deliver, free to families, “book packs,” consisting of ten, grade appropriate books with guided activities and tips for parental engagement, to students’ homes.²⁵

Community-based book distribution programs also support families as they work to improve their children’s reading skills. Two prominent book distribution programs include Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library and Reach Out and Read. Imagination Library is a book distribution program that partners with local organizations to distribute a free book each month to participating children from birth until they begin school.²⁶ Reach Out and Read distributes books to families during their visits to pediatric clinics.²⁷ In this program, in addition to physically providing books, effective book-reading strategies may be modeled for parents while medical professionals explain the importance of shared book-reading for a child’s development.²⁸

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill creates the New Worlds Reading Initiative, Florida’s first statewide book distribution program, to provide at-home literacy supports for students reading below grade level. Under the initiative, a high-quality, hardcopy book is delivered on a monthly basis to eligible students enrolled in a participating school district or charter school, defined in the bill as a “participating entity.” Their parents are provided resources to help improve their student’s reading skills and instill a love of reading. Implementation of the initiative is split between a state administrator—either the DOE or a contracted, third-party entity—and school districts partnering with local nonprofit organizations. A third-party entity must be capable of fulfilling all of the requirements for administering the initiative.

The responsibilities of the state-level administrator include:

- developing a process for interested school districts and charter schools to apply to participate in the program;
- developing, in conjunction with the Just Read, Florida! Office, a selection of books, from a variety of genres and covering a range of topics, appropriate for each grade level;
- facilitating book distribution directly or through an agreement with a book distribution company;
- developing and distributing marketing materials to help school districts and their local partners raise funding and awareness of the initiative;
- helping school districts identify potential nonprofit partners by maintaining a list of national, state, and local organizations that have experience supporting efforts to distribute books to children;
- developing training materials, including video and text resources, to assist families as they engage in reading and improve literacy skills; and
- periodically distributing to participating families helpful tips and hyperlinks to video modules via text message and e-mail.

Because participation by school districts is voluntary, the bill allows a charter school located in a nonparticipating school district to independently submit an application to the administrator, so long as it meets the same requirements as school districts. Eligible students at a charter school that is located in a participating school district must be allowed to enroll in the initiative.

²⁴ Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation, *Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation, Scholastic and TN Department of Education to Provide 580,000 Books to K-3 Students and Teachers in Tennessee*, <https://governorsfoundation.org/governors-early-literacy-foundation-scholastic-and-tn-department-of-education-to-provide-580000-books-to-k-3-students-and-teachers-in-tennessee/> (last visited on Jan. 29, 2021); Connecticut Department of Education, *Scholastic Book Packs*, <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/COVID19/BookPackInformation> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

²⁵ Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation, *Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation, Scholastic and TN Department of Education to Provide 580,000 Books to K-3 Students and Teachers in Tennessee*, <https://governorsfoundation.org/governors-early-literacy-foundation-scholastic-and-tn-department-of-education-to-provide-580000-books-to-k-3-students-and-teachers-in-tennessee/> (last visited on Jan. 29, 2021).

²⁶ *Book Giveaway Programs*, *supra* note 21 at 350.

²⁷ Reach Out & Read, *About*, <https://reachoutandread.org/about/> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

²⁸ *Book Giveaway Programs*, *supra* note 21 at 352.

A student in kindergarten through 5th grade is eligible to enroll in the initiative if he or she is identified as having a substantial reading deficiency or scored below a level 3 on the prior year's statewide, standardized ELA assessment. The bill requires participating school districts to notify the parents of eligible students that they may participate in the initiative at no cost and to provide parents with an application, developed by the administrator, to enroll their child.

The bill requires that monthly book delivery begin no later than October and last through at least June. Book delivery may continue through the summer months using local funds. The bill does not prohibit a student from enrolling in the program after monthly book delivery begins. Students remain in the initiative until they are promoted to sixth grade or their parent opts out.

The bill requires that enrolled students have the opportunity, at the beginning of each school year, to identify preferred genres and topics in order to maximize their interest in reading. So that as many eligible students as possible enroll in the initiative, the bill requires school districts and local partners to raise awareness of the initiative through:

- the student handbook;
- the read-at-home plan provided to students identified with a substantial reading deficiency;
- curriculum or parent nights at each elementary school; and
- events held jointly with the local public library. The bill specifies that library events should coincide with similar family engagement initiatives such as library card drives.

The bill requires that books be delivered at no cost to families. Funding for the delivery of books must be shared equally by the administrator and each participating school district on a pro rata basis based on total enrollment in the initiative. The bill permits the administrator to solicit donations and apply for grants for the purpose of implementing the initiative.

Beginning September 30, 2022, and annually thereafter, the administrator must submit an annual report to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Senate President, and the Commissioner of Education documenting the number of students participating in the program, the academic performance of the participating students, and the amount of funds raised by the participating entities' local partners.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Provides legislative findings.

Section 2. Creates s. 1003.485, F.S.; establishing the New Worlds Reading Initiative under the Department of Education; providing definitions; providing duties of the administrator; requiring the administrator to develop an application process; requiring the administrator, in consultation with a specified entity, to develop a selection of books; requiring the administrator to coordinate monthly book distribution to certain students; requiring the administrator to assist with local implementation of the initiative; requiring the administrator to maintain a clearinghouse of specified information; requiring the administrator to develop and disseminate certain training materials by specified means; establishing reporting requirements; providing that certain entities may participate in the initiative by completing an application; providing that participating school districts must meet specified requirements; establishing student eligibility requirements; requiring participating entities to notify parents of eligible students; requiring participating entities coordinate with the administrator to initiate book delivery; providing requirements for book delivery; allowing local funds to be used to purchase books during certain months; requiring that students be offered certain options relating to books; specifying when student enrollment ends; requiring participating entities and certain nonprofits perform certain actions to raise awareness of the initiative; requiring that books be delivered at no cost to families; authorizing the Department of Education to contract with a third-party entity; providing requirements for such third-party entity; providing requirements for funding.

Section 3. Amends s. 1008.25, F.S.; requiring that a certain notification include information about the initiative.

Section 4. Provides an effective date of July 1, 2021.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

Because the amount of funds necessary for the administrator to subsidize 50 percent of the costs to deliver books is dependent on locally raised funds and student enrollment in the initiative, the fiscal impact of the bill is indeterminate.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

Not applicable.